

Sūrah 91

Al-Shams

(The Sun)

(Makkan Period)

Title

The opening word, *al-Shams* (the sun), constitutes the title of this *Sūrah*.

Period of Revelation

Going by its style and contents, it appears to be an early Makkan *Sūrah*. It was revealed during the peak period of the Makkans' opposition to the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Subject Matter and Theme

This *Sūrah* has two broad themes: (1) The first theme is introduced in Verses 1-10. (2) The second theme permeates Verses 11-15.

As part of the first theme three truths are stressed. As the sun and the moon, day and night and the earth and the sky represent polarities and have opposing features, good and evil are not alike. The two also differ vastly in their impact and consequences. Allah does not let man lead an unbridled life, for He has granted him

so many faculties. Rather, He has infused into him the instinctive distinction between good and evil and an innate love of good and revulsion towards evil. Man's ultimate end depends upon him exercising his faculty of judgement between good and evil. It is up to man to opt for either good or evil. For his choice of the former he will attain deliverance, but in choosing the latter he will end up as a loser. As to the second theme, it cites the historical precedent of the Thamūd people in order to bring home the significance of the institution of Messengership. A Messenger is sent down to invigorate man's innate moral sense. As man fails to be guided by it, he falls prey to false notions of good and evil. To reinforce man's innate moral sense, Allah transmits to Messengers clear, definite revelation, which enables Messengers to instruct people clearly in good and evil. An instance in point is of the Prophet Ṣāliḥ (peace be upon him) who was sent down to the Thamūd. They were so much given to falsehood that they cried lies to the Prophet Ṣāliḥ (peace be upon him). When they were given the miracle of the she-camel, which they themselves had demanded, the most wicked member of the Thamūd hamstrung her, notwithstanding the Prophet's dire warnings against this outrageous act. As a result, the whole Thamūd community was routed.

It is not said anywhere in the *Sūrah* that the Makkans will meet the same fate that befell the Thamūd for the crime of rejecting the Messenger. However, similar conditions were evident in Makkah. The Makkans could, therefore, easily discern how this precedent applied to them.